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ABSTRACT

In America today, a tension exists between the continuing needs of an increasingly diverse population and the constantly dwindling resources available to serve them. This booklet looks at one type of program that provides an answer to the problem of addressing complicated human needs in a cost-effective way: family literacy. Through the stories of families whose lives were once limited by poverty, low skills, and unemployment, this booklet shares individual journeys to success. Each unique family path begins at a common crossroad--participation in a family literacy program. The programs featured are part of a national network supported by the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL). The programs have in common four essential elements: (1) adult literacy, basic skills, and life skills instruction; (2) early childhood education; (3) parent education and support group; and (4) regular opportunities for parent and child interaction. Two-page stories are given for 13 families participating in various family literacy programs throughout the United States. Contains a list of contacts for programs described in the stories. (EV)

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Family Literacy: The Journey to Success

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Stories of Courage
Stories of Change

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Family Literacy:

The Journey to Success

Stories of Courage
Stories of Change

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Family Literacy

Acknowledgments

At first glance this booklet appears to be a simple collection of 13 family stories. It is that, yet it is so much more. The journeys traveled by these 13 families represent thousands of similar journeys that will go unpublished-but not unnoticed.

On behalf of those families who quietly continue down the same path, NCFL would like to thank former family literacy students Christine Olvera, Mary Glover, Renné Ferry, Sara Silva, Dorothy Nelson, Geraldine Smith, Stacy Neal, Brian and Twanda Jordan, Rosa Gonzalez, Annette Johnson, Maxine Moses Ford, Aquanda Brown, and Lois Tallent. Each of them welcomed Ardith Hannula, NCFL staff member and author of *Family Literacy: The Journey to Success*, into their homes, workplaces, or classrooms and spent hours in personal, face-to-face interviews. In addition, they shared written responses to our questions to enrich the layers of their stories.

NCFL also expresses thanks to our panel of reviewers: Don Snodgrass, NCFL, manager, Adult Education Network; Judy Alamprese, director, Cosmos Corp.; Jim Garvin, assistant professor, Department of Administrative and Foundational Services, LSU College of Education; Gary Eyre, director, Adult Education and GED Testing, Arizona Department of Education; Robert E. Stoltz, vice president, Southern Regional Education Board. We thank you for taking time from your multiple responsibilities to offer advice and guidance.

Finally, we express our deepest gratitude to Toyota Motor Corporation for not only funding this publication, but for providing the original grant that served as a catalyst for the Toyota Families for Learning Programs located in cities across the county. The families featured in this booklet are all former participants in this program. Their stories of success are the most precious "thank you" of all.

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Table of Contents

A New Future for Mother and Three Daughters
Christine Olvera, Dallas, Texas 4

Countless Benefits for Children in Family Literacy
Mary Glover, Little Rock, Arkansas 6

A Non-traditional Path to Self-sufficiency
Renné Ferry, Seattle, Washington 8

A Teacher in Two Languages
Sara Silva, Tucson, Arizona 10

Classroom Lessons Become Family Lessons at Home
Dorothy Nelson, Nashville, Tennessee 12

Grandmother Inspires Family and Friends
Geraldine Smith, New Orleans, Louisiana 14

Next Steps at Community College
Stacy Neal, Denver, Colorado 16

Partners in Learning
Brian & Twanda Jordon, St. Louis, Missouri 18

A New Language Opens New Doors
Rosa Gonzalez, San Pedro, California 20

A Leader at Home and in the Community
Annette Johnson, Rochester, New York 22

Parental Involvement—Teaching by Example
Maxine Moses Ford, Atlanta, Georgia 24

Preparing for Two Careers and Economic Security
Aquanda Brown, Richmond, Virginia 26

A Diploma in One Hand and Self-esteem in the Other
Lois Tallent, Ft. Lauderdale, Florida 28

Foreword

In America today, a tension exists between the continuing needs of an increasingly diverse population and the ever-dwindling resources that can be used to serve them. The needs are real, as is the fact that fewer mediating resources exist.

For policymakers, for business leaders, and for educators, the obvious question has become how do we take the resources we do have and increase their effectiveness? In the swirling cauldron of human problems, and the social context in which those problems exist, how do we get more bang for our buck?

This booklet looks at one program that is providing an answer to these questions—family literacy. Through the stories of families whose lives were once limited by poverty, low skills, and unemployment this booklet shares individual journeys to success. Each unique family path begins at a common crossroad—participation in a family literacy program. The programs featured are part of a national network supported by the National Center for Family Literacy (NCFL).

The National Center for Family Literacy is committed to advancing and supporting family literacy services for millions of families across the country through programming, training, research, advocacy, and dissemination of information.

Based in Louisville, Kentucky, it was established as a nonprofit organization in 1989 with a grant from William R. Kenan, Jr. Charitable Trust. NCFL has grown from being an initiator of seven model sites, located in North Carolina and Kentucky, to becoming a catalyst and driving force behind the national family literacy movement. Approximately 30,000 families each year are enrolled in programs as a direct result of the work of NCFL. Many other families are befitting indirectly from NCFL's training and advocacy.

Family literacy programs have four essential elements:

- Adult literacy, basic skills and life skills instruction.
  Raising the education level of parents helps them gain the motivation, skills, and knowledge needed to become employed or to pursue further education or training.

- Early childhood education.
  Increasing the developmental skills of preschool children better prepares them for academic and social success in school.

- Parent education and support group.
  Providing parents with an opportunity to share their concerns with a trained instructor and/or their peers helps them learn new parenting strategies and provides support in their efforts to deal more effectively with day-to-day challenges.

- Regular opportunities for parent and child interaction.
  Providing role models and structured situations for positive parent-child interaction empowers parents in their roles as the primary teachers of their own children. This also strengthens the learning relationship between parent and child and helps parents feel more comfortable in the school setting.

These elements operate most effectively when fully integrated. Fostering teamwork and open communication allows the separate components to form a comprehensive, family-focused service approach to intergenerational education.

The model of family literacy represents a targeted approach to a targeted population, an approach that has produced highly effective results which reinforce the following points:

1. The model of family literacy builds on the very strength of American society, that is, it works to reconnect and renew families—through education, through developing parenting skills, through providing avenues of opportunity where none were thought to exist. See the stories on pages 6, 10, 14, 20, and 26.

2. It accomplishes those tasks even though it works with individuals who have often lived in a sub-culture of crime and drugs. See the stories on pages 16 and 18.

3. Family literacy programs take existing resources in adult and early childhood education and blend them into a more effective educational environment that upgrades skills and renews family spirit. See the stories on pages 12, 22, and 28.

4. Family literacy is a program that offers families a link between today's dependence and tomorrow's self-sufficiency. See the stories on pages 4, 8, and 24.

No one program, no one approach has all the answers. Certainly family literacy does not purport to, either. However, for its targeted audience, families at risk, it is highly effective. Family literacy is a real solution, for real people, in a real world.

A New Future for Mother and Three Daughters

Christine Olvera

Family Literacy Participant • Dallas, TX (1993-1994)

Christine Olvera's childhood is a powerful reminder of the dramatic changes she has made in her own life and in the lives of her three daughters. As the oldest daughter in a family of eight children, she feels that she "grew up before I should have." Memories of her childhood are painful ones.

"I never played as a child. As a little girl I didn't have much of anything. We were very poor and on welfare. My father left my mother to raise eight children on her own. I was nine years old when my mother called all my uncles and aunts on my dad's side to come get us because she could no longer take care of us."

Christine went to live with an aunt and uncle. It wasn't an easy time, she remembers. "They had two children of their own. When I was 16, I left them to stay with my grandparents, and couple of months later I met my husband."

Christine soon dropped out of school. She says she didn't worry about not having an education because her husband supported the family. Five years later, however, Christine found herself a single parent with three children under the age of four. Her husband was facing a 35-year prison sentence. Abruptly the family lost its only means of financial support.

At this point in her life, she "had to stop and look at the future of not only myself but of [my] three beautiful daughters. My daughters had to come first and I wanted them to have the best.

"When I had my children," she explains, "I told myself that my girls would never go through the cycle I did."

Although she and her daughters received government assistance and Christine worked at odd jobs, the family was barely surviving economically. Christine remembers being "physically and emotionally tired." Despite her best efforts, she knew that her life was "not getting anywhere."

Making the decision to return to school and finding the Dallas Can! Academy and its families for learning program marked a turning point in her life. Christine felt that the first thing the program did for her was build her self- esteem. It "get(s) you emotionally together so you can concentrate on school."

She also felt good about having her children with her while she got her education. Laci went to school with Christine, while the two younger girls attended a quality day care program. Getting up at 5:30 every morning

wasn't easy, Christine says. After she dressed the girls and dropped-off the younger ones at day care, Christine and Laci would then catch two buses to get to school. Her days "began early and ended late. I was exhausted going to school and then taking care of the girls all evening, but I knew I had to get an education."

Going to school with Laci became a special time for both mother and daughter.

"Learning to play with Laci taught me patience with my other children, too. Before I went to the program I was more into spanking. I'd get so angry I wouldn't let them explain. Now we have 'time-out' at our house."

Being a single mother was tough on Christine. The parenting skills that she acquired lessened this stressful role for Christine. Knowing that she could talk with the teachers and other parents at school helped her feel that she didn't have to handle everything on her own.

In June, 1993, just five months after she started the program, Christine Olvera received her GED. At first her husband thought she was "crazy" for going back to school. He soon followed her example, however, and Christine was "honored and proud" to see him graduate with the GED class of the Texas Correctional Institution.

Christine used her newfound education and completed medical clerk training.

Soon she was employed at Baylor Medical Center in Dallas "making more money than I ever thought possible, and supporting my family without government assistance."

In June of 1995, she left Baylor to take a new post with Avis Trucks/Hayes Leasing in the accounts payable department. She is excited about the challenges in her new job and feels confident that she can handle the responsibilities expected of her.

Christine looks forward to the day when her family is reunited. She and her husband feel that "seven years of marriage is too much to throw away on a mistake. We both look at this as a time to be apart and grow up." Christine and her family have grown in many ways. According to Christine, "Laci knows the importance of an education and she loves school. She just finished kindergarten and was recently tested for first grade. She did great on all the tests they gave her."

And how has this mom grown? That question is best answered in Christine's own words:

"My daughters are the most important thing in my life. I want to be a good mother and give them the things they need. I also want to be a good example for them. I only hope that my girls learn from my mistakes and know that it is never too late to make a change in you life."

Christine's daughters have an outstanding and courageous example to follow.

Countless Benefits for Children in Family Literacy

Mary Glover

Family Literacy Participant • Little Rock, AR (1993-1994)

When Mary Glover heard about the family literacy program at Harris Elementary School, she thought it was a "joke."

"Sterling Chandler [the recruitment coordinator] called and explained the program to me. On my way to the interview, I kept hoping that it was for real," she explains.

Mary couldn't believe her good fortune. She learned that both of her sons Zachariah, then three, and Caleb, who was four, would be enrolled in a pre-school program while she studied for her GED in a room across the hall from them. When she heard that transportation was included in the program, she remembers thinking that "the program would cost about $500 for nine months." But, "they kept telling me that this program was free."

Once Mary saw the learning environment in the early childhood classroom, she knew that she would not "let go" of the family literacy program.

Her adult education teacher, Ms. Bennie Waller, remembers Mary's impact on the class:

"Mary came in November and was the first student to take the GED test.

"I had a roomful of go-getters," but "they didn't decide to get-up-and-go until Mary came." That year six of the 11 adults in Mary's class passed their GED test. Her enthusiasm for learning spilled over into parent/child interaction time.

"My kids loved seeing mom in their classroom. I put 100% of me into the activities. I wanted my kids to know that learning is fun."

As a high school drop-out, Mary knew that she wanted to be a better role model for her children.

"Each day I took home the activities and games from PACT," she explains. Soon her sons were asking for large magic markers and paper to write messages to their dad while he was at work.

During Parent Time, Mary emerged as a peacemaker whenever conflict and disagreement arose. Mary learned to be a better parent because there was time set aside in the program for the parents to talk with each other about daily concerns and problems.

The students heard guest speakers talk about parenting issues. Their explanations on child development gave the class a deeper understanding of their children's behavior.

At the end of their first year in the program, Caleb and Zach were ready

to start school and Mary was anticipating a new job-as an assistant in a Head Start classroom. Head Start Administrator Diane Carr describes Mary as the "most focused and ready to achieve new employee."

While Mary was working in Head Start, she took pre-algebra and computer classes at Shorter College. These classes were "first steps" toward her fulfilling her dream of becoming a child psychologist.

Mary was asked to speak about her experiences to a group that was considering starting a program in Hot Springs, Arkansas. According to Aubrey Kelly, one of the program directors, "Head Start is in Hot Springs because Mary Glover told everyone how her boys flourished in the program."

Speaking about education comes naturally to her. Family members often hear Mary talk about the value of education. One of her sisters decided to attend the family literacy program at Harris School to work toward getting her GED. Younger family members call on her for advice in school. Mary constantly stresses the values of staying in school and studying.

"They all know my story that I'm a high school drop-out. They all see what I've accomplished."

After completing her first year as a Head Start classroom assistant, she asked if she could work in a family literacy program. This year, Mary will join the staff at her former school. She is excited about working with people who supported and encouraged her when she returned to her education.

"I want the parents in the program to see that family literacy is a springboard to all their hopes and dreams." With Mary's track record of success, there is no doubt that they will.

As for the children, they match their mother's progress.

"The benefits they received from the classroom are countless," Mary states. "Caleb scored above level after being tested by the public schools. His kindergarten year was a great success. Zachariah did quite well in the transition to a public preschool program."

In one short year, Mary and her family have learned a great deal, but this is only the beginning.

"I have just begun and so much has already happened for me. I know a lot more positive opportunities await me!"

A Non-traditional Path to Self-sufficiency

Renné Ferry

Family Literacy Participant • Seattle, WA (1992-1993, 1993-1994)

When you look at Renné Ferry, it's hard to imagine this petite woman hauling two-by-fours or pushing a wheelbarrow containing a 100-pound sack of cement. This, however, is precisely what she does as part of her training in ANEW (Apprenticeship And Nontraditional Employment For Women), a training project for women in Seattle, Washington.

Renné's path to ANEW and the added skills she has acquired began with her enrollment in a family literacy program.

"I was getting to the point where I needed to find something to do; welfare wasn't it." Renné remembers being frustrated; she needed her GED if she were to effect a change in her life. Her JOBS counselor told her about the family literacy/Even Start program at Cooper Elementary School in Seattle.

Adjusting to the program was difficult for Renné. She admits that she "didn't want to work with the kids," and her agoraphobia flared-up when field trips were scheduled.

"I didn't deal with social situations well," she says.

The staff at the family literacy program discussed her reluctance to join in PACT (parent/child interaction time) and, Renné decided to participate to please her son D'Lonn.

"All the other moms were in PACT. He really enjoyed PACT when I was there," she explains. Renné became excited about growing with her son. "I found out I could learn. I wasn't too old." Now her children invite her to "get your books, Mom, and draw with us."

Renné was learning and she didn't stop. She credits the open atmosphere of the program for developing a feeling of family.

"After being there for awhile, it felt like coming home to family," she says. Adult education teacher Janine Brodine encouraged her students to ask questions. Renné describes the classroom setting as one where Janine "let me ask questions; it didn't matter how many times I asked the same question, she allowed me to keep asking."

She says that before coming to the program, she "internalized problems." Once she began attending the program, however, she knew that "family literacy was a safe place to ask for help and feel like you'd get it."

Renné did not stop working and studying when school ended after her first year in family literacy. She placed herself on a program of self-study during the summer. Personal drive and determination helped her reach her goal; she received her GED in the summer of 1994.

This same spirit of determination carried her through the selection process for ANEW. The candidates were "put through the paces" of push-ups, sit-ups, running stairs, and pushing that wheelbarrow containing a 100-pound sack of cement. A 2 1/2 hour personal interview accompanied the physical exercises. Forty students were selected from the 200 applicants for the ANEW program; Renné Ferry was one of those 40!

These days Renné ticks off her achievements with a sense of pride and accomplishment. This former sixth-grade drop-out now reads blueprints, wires houses, uses mechanical and electrical theories on projects, does basic carpentry, welds, and works with pipe and concrete. She also talks about upgrading to a new "old" car and budgeting money to meet the monthly installments.

Renné is looking forward to her first job. She has participated in a job search day where she dropped off applications at local companies and made phone calls to inquire about employment opportunities. Now there is a sense of direction in her life-quite a change from the uncertain and frustrating times of the past.

Her vision of herself has changed, too.

"I keep shocking myself. I worked hard and it's paid off. I'm tired of being accountable to others for my money. If I can do it, anyone can. I'm going to make it-me-not the state."

A Teacher in Two Languages

Sara Silva

Family Literacy Participant • Tucson, AZ (1991-1992, 1992-1993)

Sara Silva has surprised herself. She cannot believe that she is able to speak and write in English. When she started the family literacy program in 1991, typical tasks like journal writing or class discussions were very difficult for her.

"I didn't know what to say about myself."

When Sara and her twin daughters, Marcella and Alexandra, now seven, began the family literacy program at Los Niños School in Tucson, Arizona, she worried about getting a good job without possessing the necessary skills. She felt insecure about speaking English.

Because Sara wanted to improve her skills, however, she cooperated with her teacher, Jessica Dilworth and continued to write in her journal. Slowly, very slowly, Sara felt herself being "drawn out of my shell."

"My teacher in the program never accepted from me that I couldn't do it. She always said, 'Try it. You are capable.' "

Sara may not have believed in her capability four years ago, but today her words reflect her confidence.

"Now, I am taking writing classes as part of my course work at Pima College and every assignment I'm given, I am able to take examples from my family and my own life."

Sara has a lot of choices in using examples from her own life. She could write about the time she spent volunteering in the school during her first year in the program. It made the "school feel like my second home." Because she was so sincere in her work, during the second year of the program, the principal asked if she was interested in a part-time job as a teaching assistant. She was! Sara thinks back to the interview and remembers being nervous: the interview was in English. Nervous or not, Sara got the job!

Or she could write about working in the third grade classroom that next year. Sara gained much insight into dealing with children. She learned patience in coping with each student's needs. After one year of part-time work, she became a full-time bilingual instructional assistant.

"It is so beautiful for me to see children developing in two languages," she says. "Speaking two languages means that you are educated, not only in the language, but in the way of life and culture, too. Having one language is rich; having two is richer. I love that my job involves enriching the culture of the bilingual kids."

Sara's latest chapter could begin with the day a year ago last summer when the principal gave her information that would open more doors for

her. Sara applied for and won a scholarship to complete a bachelor of arts degree in bilingual education. Sara has maintained a 3.5 average at the local community college. Next year she will transfer to the college of education at the University of Arizona.

Balancing a full-time class schedule and being the single parent of four children keeps Sara extremely busy. Her oldest daughter, Krystal, 11, often remarks about how much her mother studies. When Sara and her children get together at night to do their homework and make plans for the future, all of her children tell her that they are going to the university too, even though Sara suspects that the twins may be going because there is "a big swimming pool there."

Sara could continue her story by adding the "teachable moments" she finds in the routines of daily life in a family. One such moment occured with Jesus, her eight-year-old son. He didn't like school at first. Sara reports that he complained about stomach pains every morning so that he wouldn't have to go. Sara used this and similar opportunities to stress the importance of education to her children.

"I tell them to get their education when they're young because it's harder to go to school at my age. I'm 40 years old; I'm raising a family and I have a full-time job. I spend the weekends doing homework."

Sara also takes a different view of her parenting strategies:

"I feel I'm a much better parent now. Before I was in the program I was horrible. I treated my children like my parents treated me. I had no patience; I yelled at them and I hit them. I didn't hear anything they said."

Now the children use many of the parenting techniques that Sara learned about in the family literacy program on each other.

"Often I hear them telling each other to take time-out or to go to their room and think about they're saying."

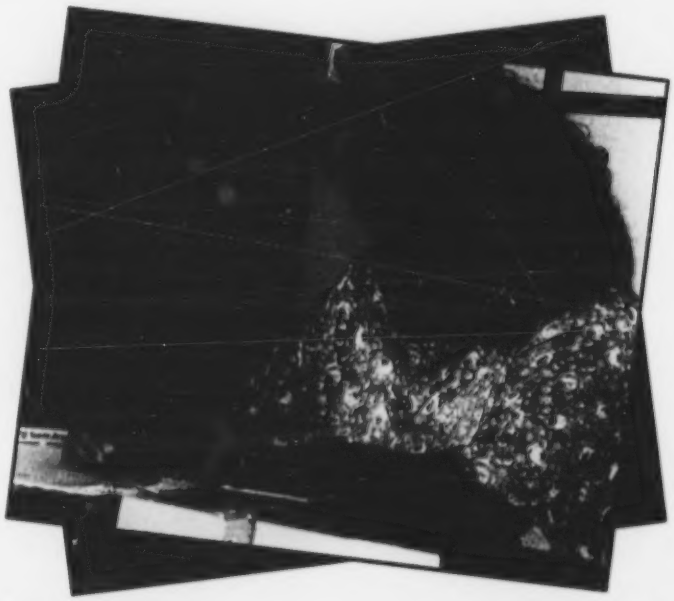
Another topic Sara could write about is the success of her children in school. Krystal graduated from elementary school with many awards and was recognized in a special ceremony as one of the best and brightest students. The Sunnyside Neighborhood Association gave her its "All-American Award" in academic excellence, community spirit, citizenship, leadership, and courtesy. Ed Pastor, congressman from Arizona, sent her a personal letter of congratulations. The twins, Marcella and Alex, have been honor students and were chosen as outstanding students by Sunnyside District.

Sara serves on the Chapter I Advisory Board in her children's school. She spoke, in English, at the Tuscon Community Foundation annual dinner about how much the family literacy program has meant to her, about how she is trying to make it financially without taking welfare, and how she hopes to someday be self-sufficient and not accept food stamps.

" Before the program," she says, "I had no goals. I didn't expect anything. I slept late. I had no ambition; I was tired and sad when I thought about my kids. What could I offer them?"

"The program opened the door for me," she continues. "I am out of my shell. I have set high expectations for myself as a person. I'm not willing to settle for just anything."

Yes, Sara could write a book about her experiences since she enrolled in the family literacy program in 1991. Perhaps, some day she will!



Classroom Lessons Become Family Lessons at Home

Dorothy Nelson

Family Literacy Participant • Nashville, TN (1993-1994)

Dorothy Nelson greets the world with a wide, face-splitting smile. It wasn't always so.

Her life used to be one of unemployment, sitting at home all day watching television, "doing nothing and wasting time."

After leaving school in the 12th grade to have her first child, Dorothy found herself "living the life of motherhood." Two other children soon followed. Despite enrolling in programs over the years to earn her GED, nothing worked.

That changed nine years after she left high school when she enrolled in the family literacy program offered by NashvilleREAD at Napier Elementary School, the same school her three children attended.

There were a lot of things that made Dorothy feel differently about this program than she did about the others. For one thing, it was close to home so walking to school with her children was not difficult. Most importantly, however, her teacher, Doris DeSalle, gave Dorothy the determination to get her GED. Dorothy especially appreciated her teacher's efforts in making the classroom atmosphere "like one big happy family." She stayed in family literacy because she felt that Doris gave everyone a chance to talk through their problems. The program time during the day for the adults to work through problems that cropped-up in their daily lives.

Elementary classroom teachers at Napier School encouraged the family literacy students, too.

"We'd walk down the hall and they would pat us on the back," Dorothy remembers. "It made me feel that it was worth going to school."

Not only did Dorothy find that she was acquiring the skills needed to get her GED, but she says that PACT (parent/child interaction) time "started me down the road" to seeing her children in a different light. She admits to being skeptical about the idea of parents and children playing together, especially since the children chose the activity to do with the parents during their time together. Dorothy says that once she "got into it," she began to see the value in allowing children to take the lead in the activity. This time became a happy time for both Dorothy and her son, Ricky.

She carried what she learned in PACT time into her home-the reading, coloring, and conversations continued. At home Ricky began talking about what they did together in school. Dorothy knew it was important for her to be in school every day because her son looked forward to their

time together.

The parenting skills she learned in the family literacy program taught her patience with her children. "Listening" to children rather than "hollering" at them and "treating children like you expect to be treated" has enabled her to become more sensitive to her children's feelings and needs.

Dorothy believes that her two other children benefited from their mom being in the family literacy program. Her daughter, Mahogany, wasn't particularly interested in school until she saw her mother going to class. Now the family takes turns reading books to each other. Everyone selects a book to read; Ricky talks about the pictures when it's his turn to read to the family.

Dorothy also says that the family literacy program expanded her idea of what she can do. It wasn't too long before Dorothy began looking beyond the GED. Her next step was to enroll in a job training course on childcare through the Metropolitan Action Commission. Within three months she received her certification and soon was hired for the staff of Over the Rainbow Day Care, where she is responsible for the care of the 6- to 18-month-old children enrolled in the program.

When Dorothy looks to her future she sees herself working as an LPN. She is on the waiting list for admission to a local program. She says she wants to "keep on learning."

Her mature, self-sufficient attitude she credits in part to the family literacy program.

"I think things through more. Now, I don't take what I can get, I go get what I want!" Dorothy has opened a bank account and enjoys feeling that "my money is my money." She recently purchased a new washer and a bedroom suite and has bigger dreams.

"I want a house of my own. I don't want to spend the rest of my life in public housing. I want to be dependent only on myself, no one else."

Dorothy Nelson is determined to become self-sufficient and she is moving forward with her career plans to do just that.

Grandmother Inspires Family and Friends

Geraldine Smith

Family Literacy Participant • New Orleans, LA (1992-1993)

Geraldine Smith has the distinction of being the first GED graduate in the family literacy program in New Orleans.

It all began while attending a Chapter I meeting. There, Geraldine heard a description of the family literacy program that emphasized how parents could get their GEDs while their preschool children learned.

After the meeting, she continued to ask questions. Randrella, Geraldine's granddaughter, was the right age to participate. Since she played a primary role in caring for Randrella, Geraldine was invited to attend with her. She did not jump at the opportunity, however, and instead expressed several concerns. Her reservations were quickly swept aside. "Yes, there is transportation to and from school," she was told. "Yes, meals are provided. Yes, the program is free."

Still, mentally, she was not ready to go back to school:

"I was kicking 51!"

Putting personal reservations aside, however, she and Randrella went to school together.

Randrella became excited about her surroundings and her daily routine. Geraldine, on the other hand, was still "leery about becoming totally committed to what I was there for."

"Finally, I had to make a decision-either I'm going to do this or not. And," she told herself, "if I stay, I'm not going to just sit here."

Evaluating the part Randrella was playing in her life at the time, she decided to stay.

"I told myself I was doing it for Randrella," she says laughing. "Little did I know what I was doing for myself."

Ten months later Geraldine Smith received her GED.

While she was in the program, her enthusiasm for learning and her willingness to work with the children provided much encouragement for the younger parents.

Family literacy enabled her to learn more about parenting, and to parent in a way she was not equipped to do when she was raising her own children.

A person who challenges herself and who works hard to rise to that challenge, after getting her GED, Geraldine enrolled in Delgado Community College in elementary education. Despite her fears and anxieties about being in college at her age, she persevered and completed her first semester with a grade point average of 3.6. Her second semester she

had a 3.0 grade point average. Geraldine kept going, she says, "to show my daughter that it's not impossible to go back to school to get a GED and to go to college at any age."

Her example convinced not only her daughter to return to school for her GED, but also inspired one of Geraldine's friends to return to school. Geraldine also used much of the information and many of the ideas from the family literacy parent group to persuade one of her sons that he had the ability to make a better life for himself.

"He now works for Universal Ogden, an off-shore oil company. He feels more confident and positive about what he's doing and about himself," his mother says proudly.

Based on her performance in a practicum course while in college, Geraldine was recommended to Little Angels Providers Inc., as a possible home care child provider. She has opened her own day care center which she runs out of her home and has six children enrolled in the program. With funds from the government, she feeds the children three meals a day-breakfast, afternoon snack, and dinner. After breakfast Geraldine puts those children who go to school on the bus. The younger children stay with Geraldine until their parents pick them up in the evening.

In setting up her own business Geraldine relied on the examples of early childhood education that she and Randrella experienced in family literacy.

"My [family literacy] experience has come in handy with this job because I conduct my days with the children as if I were still in the program," she says. "I teach them alphabet songs. I read to them, and I have books with no words so they can read to me."

"The [family literacy] program got rid of the 'I'm nots' for me: I'm not going to be able to pay the rent, the lights. I'm not going to be able to get my GED. I'm not going to make it in college," she says. "I feel good about what I'm doing. I've learned you're never too old to be productive, to go back to school to learn."

Stacy Neal

Family Literacy Participant • Denver CO (1993-1994)

High school for Stacy Neal was "party time."

"I got into the wrong crowd, ditched classes, dropped-out, had my first baby at 17, signed papers to give my son to his dad's family, freaked-out, ran-off to Texas and did a lot of drugs!"

She continued to have children and work at "five dollar an hour jobs." Knowing that she was "stuck in a place [she] didn't want to be," and to get the education she needed to support her growing family, Stacy enrolled in a GED program-and quickly dropped out. She explains that she felt "dumb" in the GED program, and remembers that no one would help her.

When she walked into the family literacy program at the Adult Learning Source at the Clayton School in Denver, Colorado, Stacy doubted that she would ever get her GED. It was the spring of 1994. Eight weeks later, in the summer of 1994, Stacy Neal achieved that goal. She says that without family literacy she wouldn't be where she is today. The family literacy program showed her what her capabilities are and gave her the help that she needed to fulfill her goal.

"Family literacy opened a new door. My life changed before my eyes. I had nothing but success instead of feeling failure."

Knowing that her daughters Chantelle, age 2, and Danielle, age 6, were in the same building attending classes that were both stimulating and fun eased her mind. Part of the fun was PACT time (parent/child interaction). Stacy remembers this part of the program as a "neat experience."

"You were learning as they [the children] were learning, even though you were playing with them," she explains. "In PACT you learn how to play with your children and observe what they're doing." PACT helped her children feel that she was really paying attention to them and helped her understand her daughters better as she learned more about their behavior.

The family literacy program "helped me to understand my children's learning capabilities," she adds. "PACT time gave me a way to communicate and play with my children on their level. I learned that it is very important to let my children do things their way and allow them to make their own mistakes. They taught me how to be a playmate as well as a mother. Since they went to school with me, my children saw how important school is for me and, in turn, for all our futures."

When her girls were in day care, Stacy simply dropped them off in the

morning and picked them up at the end of the day. With the insights into child development that she learned in the family literacy program, Stacy now spends time talking with her daughters' teachers, observing what they eat at school, and talking about their daily activities.

Stacy has not always found it easy to raise her children alone. However, the parent support group and the new ideas she received on parenting made this role less stressful.

"I had little patience with my children before the program," she says. "I was short tempered and easily frustrated. Now I try to explain to them why I'm saying 'no'." This technique takes a lot of time from the busy, 25 year old's day, but Stacy firmly believes that she needs to explore the boundaries of her children's lives with them.

After Stacy received her GED, she returned to the family literacy program in the fall of '94 to improve her writing and math skills and to continue to enhance her parenting skills. "I want [my children's] memories of childhood to be good ones," she explains.

Now Stacy is studying computer programming at the Community College of Denver TEC, North, where her GPA for the first and second semesters was 3.68 and 4.0, respectively. Her teachers are so impressed with her ability that they have encouraged her to make plans to pursue a bachelor's and even a master's degree.

After she receives her associate degree in computer science, Stacy wants to get a full-time job and continue her education on a part-time basis. Right now, she and her family are supported by AFDC, but Stacy looks forward to the day when she will be self-sufficient.

Family literacy gave me the courage to see in myself the accomplishments I can achieve in the present and the future. My participation in the program was a building block for my self-esteem and my knowledge to go on to higher levels of education. They believed in me for who I was and who I could become."

Who she becomes is uppermost in her mind these days. The former high school drop-out who ran off and did drugs wants to "make a difference in my life, my children's lives, and other people's lives."

She already has.

Partners in Learning

Brian & Twanda Jordon

Family Literacy Participant • St. Louis, MO (1993-1994)

"I was a drug addict and a drug dealer . . . I had to turn my life around . . . I can be an asset because I understand young people. I now know the difference between self-destructive behavior and working toward positive self-improvement."

Twenty-five-year-old Brian Jordan spoke these words before an audience of 1,400 people gathered at the Third Annual National Conference on Family Literacy in the spring of 1994. The journey from the streets to the podium of a national conference began when Brian and his wife, Twanda, entered the family literacy program called Families First offered by the Normandy School District in St. Louis, Missouri.

Up to this point in his life Brian had tried "four or five GED programs. I'd start and never finish." He confesses that at first he was "nervous" about being "the only guy [in the family literacy classroom]."

Brian feels that he stayed in the program because teacher Margie Payne kept "encouraging and pushing me." Brian and Twanda enjoyed the positive learning environment and sharing a sense of purpose and closeness with the other students.

One of their children, Brian Jordan, Jr., went to school with his mom and dad. With four other children to care for, Twanda was delighted that the program gave her time to interact in a "one on one" relationship with her son. According to Twanda, this was the son who was always "busy, busy, busy; you constantly had to talk to him."

Brian was pleased that the program showed parents different ways of communicating with their children. He admits that "even though Brian is pretty sharp, I now see that some questions must be asked of him in a different way because of his developmental stage. The way we communicate with our kids is crucial to the type of bond that we want to have with them."

Family literacy "has shown me how I can teach my children while doing little everyday activities," he says.

Brian took his GED exam in May and received his certificate in October of 1994.

"Getting my GED has motivated me even more to achieve higher goals," Brian says. He has been studying to take the written exam to enter the City of St. Louis Police Academy. "I will retake that part of the test in January of '96."

"As a police officer, I will be able to help the community, council gang

members and be a role model for the public," he says. Because Brian knows "where the young people are coming from, I understand their frustrations with our society today. As a police officer, I can demonstrate that we who are angry with society must work in a positive way with society in order to change things for the better."

As a member of a Christian Task Force at his church, Brian talks to groups of teens to encourage them to stay in school.

"I also stress the importance of going back to get a GED. I tell them, 'If I can do it, so can you.'"

January '96 will be a big month for the Jordans. Twanda is working toward her GED and hopes to walk across the stage in January to receive her certificate. She is enrolled in St. Louis Community College where she is taking classes that apply to a degree in funeral services. Someday she plans to open her own funeral home.

Twanda wants to be a positive role model for her children.

"I want my kids to be proud and say, 'That's my mom. Look what she did.'"

As Brian told the audience at the conference, "Perhaps [our] five children might not understand what it means that my wife and I did not finish high school. Yet, they do see and understand that their mother and father go to school. Twanda and I are showing our children that school and literacy are very important. By the children modeling our behavior, they will one day realize and possess the benefits of having a good education."

A New Language Opens New Doors

Rosa Gonzalez

Family Literacy Participant • San Pedro, CA (1993-1994)

Rosa Gonzalez is proud of herself today and she has every reason to be. Just a few short years ago this 30-year-old mother of three stayed in the house most of the time because she felt that her English wasn't "good" and people wouldn't understand her when she talked with them.

"I was busy, busy, busy. I worked in the house and my little boy, Fabian, watched TV all day. I didn't go alone to clinics or to places where they spoke English."

That was two years ago. Now Rosa is comfortable leaving her home to keep appointments at the clinic, and using public transportation to take her to other places around the city of San Pedro, California. In June of 1995, she received her eighth grade diploma and began her High School Diploma Program the following September.

What happened to bring about this change? Fifteen years ago Rosa came to the United States from Mexico looking for "a good job and a better life." And, as she remembers, not thinking much "about the English lanugage."

Once her sons started school, they asked a parent's favorite question: "Mom, can you help me with my homework?" Rosa soon realized that her limited knowledge of English kept her from helping her sons. She remembers having trouble with vocabulary words and feeling badly that her children "couldn't understand why I couldn't help them."

All this changed after she enrolled in the family literacy program at San Pedro/Narbonne Community College. There she not only had the opportunity to study English, but also could play and learn with her four-year-old son, Fabian.

"When the teachers told me that I would spend an hour in the early childhood classroom playing and learning with Fabian, I said, 'What?' "

Rosa says that the program opened her eyes to the value of play in her child's life. After several weeks of class, Fabian told her how much he liked going to school with her.

"I like school because we play together, he said. "When we're in the house, you don't have time to play with me."

"Now I make time to read books with him and help him learn his colors," she explains. When I started in the literacy program I didn't have patience with my son. In this program I learned many things, but the best for me was how to play with my son and have patience with him."

Rosa feels that at the same time, her son learned to become self-

reliant. Part of Fabian's classroom learning was to put away materials that he and his classmates used during the day. Before enrolling in the program, Fabian was a reluctant participant in cleaning-up his room. Now, he and his other brothers "pitch-in" around the house to help her.

With her sons helping-out around the house, the whole family enjoys an added benefit. Rosa now has time to take her sons to the park and to the library, where they head straight for the computers.

As Rosa's confidence in her ability to speak English grew, she joined the first group of "Math Moms" (M&M's) at the elementary school. This group tutors the students in math every week. She was the first student in the family literacy program to be employed by the Adult School as a Student Body Worker. She opened a savings account as a result of her employment. She also volunteered to work in the school cafeteria.

Rosa is proud that one of her sons was selected to transition from his ESL class to an English-only class this year. She feels that her interest in learning English has helped him, too.

Her teacher, Sharon McMarr, reports that Rosa's stories about speaking English in the community were especially interesting and motivational to the other students. Rosa remembers riding the bus with a woman, who, speaking no English and having no money, was confused and worried about where she was going. Acting as an interpreter between the woman and the bus driver, Rosa was able to sort out the problem to everyone's satisfaction.

As Rosa looks to her future, she wants to study for her driver's license and someday become a teacher's assistant. Not a bad start for someone who felt she needed to stay in the house because her English wasn't "good."

A Leader at Home and in the Community

Annette Johnson

Family Literacy Participant • Rochester, NY (1992-1993)

Life for Annette Johnson, a 29-year-old mother of five children, has been painful and unsettling at times. A 10th-grade dropout, Annette has been well acquainted with the economics of poverty. Even though she wanted to give her children some of the extras in life, she felt she could not.

"I felt I had no chance to have a career."

Moving from Florida to Rochester, New York, a community where she knew no one, heightened those feelings and separated Annette from her support system of family members.

Tired of the endless stream of minimum wage jobs that led to nowhere, Annette set her goal on becoming a nurse and owning a big, beautiful house. She knew that she needed her GED to get into nursing school, and went to the family literacy program at the Charles T. Lunsford Elementary School #19 in Rochester looking for a way to end her "unmanageable" and "confused" life.

"I ran into a lot of problems at first," she remembers. "I was in a strange place; cold weather was different for us; we hung in there. Social studies was bad news. My son Howard read my social studies book to me."

Soon, however, Annette realized that she was "surrounded by people who were concerned about my future and my children's future." She was glad to go to the family literacy program to "be around people who wanted to go to school" and "to get my mind off the depressing parts of life."

Going to school every day with her five children changed Annette's life as a mother and as a person. Before coming to the family literacy program, she reveals that she had a "hit or miss" style of parenting. Now the family is closer; they sit down and read together. Annette wants her children always to be able to talk with her. The parenting techniques that Annette learned in the family literacy program gave her alternative methods of dealing with her children rather than saying "no" all the time. There is less tension in the family now. What she has learned in family literacy has put her on firm ground in her role as a single parent.

In the spring of 1993 Annette's essay on her life since joining a family literacy program won her a trip to the Annual National Conference on Family Literacy in Louisville, Kentucky. After getting her GED in 1994, she became a member of Rochester's AmeriCorps program. In 1995, Annette returned to this same conference as one of two presenters

selected to talk about how AmeriCorps Family Literacy Corps members participate in education, training, community service, and reflection.

At one point in the conference, she stood in the spotlight in front of 1,500 people and spoke briefly about AmeriCorps. When she sat down, she said, "Two years ago when I was here I wondered if I would ever be able to speak in front of a group like this. Now I have come back here and I did it!"

Community service is one of the hallmark's of the AmeriCorps Family Literacy Corps Program. Members are required to give 1,700 hours of service to their communities. Annette provides service to children, ages 6 to 13, at a neighborhood recreation center where she uses her mediation training to help kids in conflict work out peaceful solutions to their problems. She has planted lilacs, gone on a door-to-door immunization drive, helped to clean five streets during Clean -up New York Day, became a nursing home volunteer, and recruited high school dropouts for the family literacy program.

Judy Kiley, the project coordinator, describes Annette as someone who takes each learning opportunity seriously.

"She's the type of worker employers will be looking for in the year 2000; she's open to new opportunities, even when it's a stretch," Kiley says. "Annette's flexible-she can be both a team player and a leader."

Annette credits the 120-hour, 30-week Child Development Associate (CDA) classes for teaching her about the behavior and developmental needs of children 0 to 5 years old. These classes, along with the community service requirement, are part of AmeriCorps' mission of community service and community development.

While attending her CDA classes at night, she assisted the teacher in the family literacy early childhood classroom in the morning and worked in the adult education classroom in the afternoon.

"I had a chance to talk about what happened with the children during the day in my CDA class at night," she points out.

By fulfilling her AmeriCorps requirements, Annette received a grant to further her education. Three hundred people applied for the 60 places in the LPN classes that began in July of 1995. Annette's name was in one of those slots. She's well on her way to fulfilling her dream of becoming a nurse.

In looking back over the changes in her life since she moved to Rochester, Annette says she feels less scared and less alone.

"Before coming to these programs I was all alone; I felt I had nothing going for me. Now I feel that I'm a person, too. The goals that I wanted to achieve can come true."

Annette Johnson, once the new kid on the block in Rochester, is making significant contributions not only to her family, but also to her community.

Parental Involvement–Teaching by Example

Maxine Moses Ford

Family Literacy Participant • Atlanta, GA (1991-1992, 1993-1994)

Maxine Moses Ford laughs at the memory of herself getting onto the school bus for her first day of class at the family literacy program at the M. Agnes Jones School in Atlanta.

"I was so scared; I thought I was going to be the oldest one in the class. It turned out that there was another lady in there who was a year older," she remembers with a smile. The first year she was in the program, Maxine and her son, Donny, rode the school bus together.

"You know how determined I was if I came to school everyday on the school bus! I'd never put anyone through that," she says recalling those days.

Working at a part-time job during the evening sometimes made getting up in the morning "a hard thing to do" for the 33-year-old mother of one son. Donny, however, never failed to nudge her awake with the words, "Momma, it's time to go to school."

Maxine says her reason for coming to the program was to get her son into the pre-school program.

"Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought that I would be the one to advance," she says proudly. Her life before the program was one of "sitting in the house all day." Once she started attending the family literacy program, Maxine realized that her dream of becoming a teacher just might come true.

"I've always wanted to be a pre-school teacher, but I'm not so good at math, and I was afraid to take the test to come to school." She overcame her reluctance to take the entrance exam for vocational school with help from the adult education teacher in the family literacy program, who's belief in Maxine's abilities was contagious.

After completing the family literacy program, Maxine passed the exam and entered Atlanta Area Technical School. A year later she completed her course of studies to become an early childhood instructor. Shortly after that, Maxine got her first job in a family literacy program.

Watching her students grow in self-confidence is a source of pride for this new teacher, who says that she sometimes gets "more excited about learning" than do her students. The first time she was called "teacher" marked a new beginning for Maxine.

"I had one little girl who was just like me, saying 'I can't, I can't!'" Maxine recalls. "But I told her that in my room, you can!"

Maxine knows that getting the parents of her students involved in their

children's education is the key to success. Her personal experience in the family literacy program showed her firsthand the positive role parents have in their children's education. Now she has the opportunity to encourage the parents of her own pre-school students to become partners with her in their children's education. This is a role she enjoys.

Maxine has set many goals since participating in the family literacy program. The family atmosphere she found in the program was crucial to her reaching them. She credits the support of her fellow students and her teacher for the "success I am today."

To Maxine Moses Ford, success means having a full-time job; a marriage; seeing her son placed in a class that meets his needs; buying furniture with no finance charges; joining a credit union to save for the future; making plans to buy a house; and fulfilling her dream of becoming a teacher.

Preparing for Two Careers and Economic Security

Aquanda Brown

Family Literacy Participant • Richmond, VA (1993-1994)

"I've never been so happy."

That's how Aquanda Brown describes her life now. With her nurse's aide diploma, she is currently working at a nursing home and no longer needs AFDC. She has her own apartment, a driver's license, and a used car. She's opened a bank account and has her own checkbook.

"I am able to save money-no more lay-aways," she says proudly!

Aquanda wasn't always so happy. The 21-year-old mother of three children considers herself as always being a nice person-deep down, "but I had a bad attitude; I was grouchy all the time."

Although she doesn't regret having her children at an early age, she remembers being depressed because she couldn't provide for them the way she wanted to.

"I had an eighth grade education. I had to take public assistance."

One day she decided to answer an ad in a pamphlet describing the family literacy program at Clark Springs Elementary School in Richmond, Virginia.

"Miss Sharon (Belcher) and Miss Emmaline (Taylor) interviewed my grandmother and me. They looked like they wanted me to come to the program."

Aquanda responded to their warm invitation. She enrolled in the program in September of 1993. Some days weren't good ones for her as she tried to adjust to the routine of a classroom.

"It was hard. I had been out of school for so long. I had kids and responsibilities."

Aquanda and her children lived with her grandmother on the north side of town. Since the school was on the other side of town, she worked out a schedule that gave her time to get her infant to the day care center and to get herself and her other two children to Clark Springs.

As she continued to attend class, Aquanda learned how to talk about disagreements without "blowing-up." Her attitude improved, especially toward the authority figures around her. She studied hard and took her GED test on the day before Thanksgiving. The normally long weeks before Christmas lengthened considerably for Aquanda that year.

"I can remember after taking it [the GED test], being so nervous thinking I didn't pass. My teacher kept my hopes up."

Christmas of 1993 was one Aquanda says she will never forget. Her GED diploma arrived in the mail on Christmas Eve. "It was the best

Christmas present I could ever have!"

"Getting my GED was a start," she says. "I was excited to see what was next for me. My teachers told me, 'You're on a roll-keep going.' "

Aquanda took her teachers' advice and enrolled in a nurse's aide program. Her two children remained at Clarks Springs while she attended classes at another site. She had learned how to manage her time well, and both mother and children made it to class every day.

While that first year of the program was one of hard work, there were times for celebration, as well. Aquanda fondly recalls the prom she and her family literacy classmates attended. The teachers, who are "always doing something for us," helped the students get from the family literacy program sites to the prom.

"All the family literacy programs came. We had bake sales in the school to raise money. My grandmother bought me my dress, shoes, jewelry.

"[I feel like] I didn't miss anything from high school."

In June of 1994 Aquanda received her nurses aide diploma and began working in one of the city's nursing homes.

Now Aquanda is moving toward another goal-an LPN license. She passed the entrance exam and is scheduled to begin classes in August of 1996. In the meantime, she has made investigating the legal assistant program at J. Sergeant Reynolds Community College a top priority. She wants to be prepared with two careers in case one doesn't work out.

"No one can turn me down for a job if I get all the education I can."

Aquanda's life has changed in others ways, also. She now is closer to her family and has gained their respect. Last Christmas an uncle sent her a check for $500 as an acknowledgment of her hard work. For Aquanda, that check represents much more than the dollar figure.

"I have the respect of people who never respected me before."

She credits the family literacy program for helping her.

"I've learned to be responsible." "The staff helped me understand my children in a caring way and how to discipline them in a way that we will all understand. I have a wonderful relationship with all my children now."

With a GED and nurse's aide diploma already to her credit and her eyes on an LPN license, Aquanda wants to be sure that her children will never be able to say, "My momma didn't finish school, so why should I ?"

A Diploma in One Hand and Self-esteem in the Other

Lois Tallent

Family Literacy Participant • Ft. Lauderdale, FL (1993-1994)

It took Lois Tallent a long time to return to school. Shy, withdrawn and never liking school, Lois dropped out at 16.

Seventeen years later, at age 33, she found herself married with two children, no education, and wondering: "Is this all there is?" At this point in her life, Lois remembers thinking about what direction her life should take and being "uncertain about a lot of things."

"I was dragging my tail trying to figure out what to do," she admits, "when a phone call changed my life."

Lois writes about this experience:

"It was in August 1993 when I got a call that would change my outlook on life, probably forever. I received a call from a [family literacy program] staff member—a sweet voice asking if I would be interested in the program. This person explained that preschool programs were filled and that she would like to offer me and my child another alternative as a participant in family literacy."

For Lois and her son, Daniel, the program at Carver Ranches Education Training Resource Center in Hollywood, Florida, was an introduction into the world of learning. When she walked into the early childhood classroom, Lois was reassured that this was the right place for her son.

The bright colors and the learning centers convinced her that this would be a fun place for Daniel, who loved the program from the start.

For herself, Lois wanted her GED in order to get a better job. Little did she know how much more this program would give to her.

"Something has been lifted off me because [I tried] to accomplish this goal. I've done a 360 degree turnaround. The negativity in my life is diminished. After being involved in family literacy, I have a more positive outlook on everything."

That new attitude extends from Lois' academic goals to her personal life—all the way to helping others in the community.

The staff remembers Lois as being defensive and unsure of herself at the beginning of the program. But as she says, "Even if I came in with a negative outlook, the staff quickly turned it into a positive one."

Soon after Lois received her GED in May of 1994, the staff began talking about the possibility of her going to college. Uncertain if she'd ever make it as a college student, Lois enrolled in Broward Community College that fall to study accounting as her first step to fulfill her dream of becoming a teacher.

Realizing her educational goals was one benefit of the family literacy program. By the time Lois left Carver Ranches and went to Broward Community College, she was convinced that she was a better mother, had better social skills, and knew how to access community resources when she needed them.

"I knew I could be a better mother—there was room for improvement there. We learned how to discipline without anger, how to set limits for our children, and be consistent in our discipline and expectations with our children."

Lois is no longer a person who thinks "things will work out by themselves." When her children had problems adjusting to school, Lois talked with teachers, arranged meetings with principals, and the situation improved. She took an interest in her fellow family literacy students and now has "wonderful friendships from the program." The students support each other and, along with the support of her family, Lois feels that she can make it through college.

Lois' interest in her education has encouraged her husband to improve his reading. At first, Lois saw that her husband was intimidated by her return to school. Now she brings home books from the local library to help him with his reading. She has also been encouraging him to return to school to get his GED.

When she found her mother-in-law living alone with the "roof falling down over head" and so ill that "she was passing out in the yard," she called the community development agency and confidently worked through the steps needed to have the house repaired. She used the same confidence when she dealt with the illness of her mother-in-law.

Perhaps this portion of Lois' speech presented at her family literacy class's graduation best summarizes her feelings about the program:

"We tip-toed into this school, but [we are] marching out with our diplomas in one hand and self-esteem in the other. As a result, our children are prepared to go on to kindergarten, fearless, and more confident. But more importantly, ready to learn."

Today, Lois and her family continue on that same path!

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